

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SSM-03 CIAE-00
DODE-00 NSAE-00 NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00
PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 IO-13
OMB-01 TRSE-00 /077 W
-----037626 091840Z /41

O R 091615Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7025
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 1255

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, LE
SUBJ: OUTLOOK FOR LEBANON: CONVERSATION WITH PRESIDENT SARKIS

1. CALLED ON PRESIENT SARKIS MORNING MARCH 9 FOR REVIEW OF
SITUATION. STARTED OUT BY SAYING HAD NOT SEEN HIM FOR SOME TIME
AND WOULD LIKE TO KNOW HIS VIEWS AND WHAT WE COULD DO TO HELP
HIM.

2. SARKIS SAID HE HAD THREE PROBLEMS WHICH CURRENTLY PRE-
OCCUPYING HIS MIND. FIRST OF THESE WAS AFTERMATH OF FAYYADIYAH.
INVESTIGATION AND COURT WERE NOT MODEL SOLUTION, BUT THEY
WERE THE BEST LEBANESE COULD PUT TOGETHER. HE THOUGHT THEY
HAD CHANCE OF SOLVING PROBLEM WITH A LITTLE TIME. COURT
WOULD SOON BE ISSUING JUDGEMENTS. SYRIANS WANTED EVERYONE
TO BE EXECUTED. HE DID NOT THINK THINGS WOULD GO QUITE THAT
FAR BUT SYRIAN RESENTMENTS WOULD HAVE TO BE ASSUAGED AND
PEOPLE PUNISHED. HE HOPED THERE WOULD BE COURT
DECISION WHICH EVERYONE COULD EVENTUALLY ACCEPT. HE

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EXPECTED THERE WOULD BE LOCAL OPPOSITION TO IT, HOWEVER,
AND WE COULD PERHAPS BE OF ASSISTANCE TO HIM IN THAT EVENT.

3. I ASKED IF ONLY LEBANESE WERE TO BE JUDGED. HE
SAID NOT NECESSARILY. IT WAS POSSIBLE SOME SYRIANS
WOULD ALSO BE JUDGED. REGARDING LATTER, HE SAID
SYRIANS WERE KEEPING BODIES OF THEIR MEN KILLED IN

ACTION IN THE FREEZER AND SENDING THEM HOME TO BE
BURIED IN TWOS AND THREES TO AVOID ADVERSE REACTION.

4. SECOND PROBLEM WAS NATIONAL CONCILIATION. IT WAS NOT
POSSIBLE TO PUT THIS TOGETHER UNTIL SUCH TIME AS SYRIANS
WERE MOLLIFIED, OTHERWISE THEY WOULD PLAY
SPOILING ROLE. DEPENDING ON HOW JUDGEMENT WENT DOWN, HE WOULD
MOVE FORWARD ON THIS FRONT. DRAFT LEGISLATION WAS ALREADY
PREPARED FOR WHAT WOULD BE SUBSTANTIAL CONSTITUTIONAL
CHANGES. THEY WOULD NOT PLEASE EVERYONE, BUT HE WAS
DETERMINED TO GO AHEAD AS LONG AS HE WAS CERTAIN THAT
IT WOULD NOT PRECIPITATE CONFESSIONAL CLASHES. THE
HARDEST SINGLE ISSUE WAS THE PROPOSAL FOR THE PARLIAMENT
TO ELECT THE PRIME MINISTER. THIS HAD BEEN CONCEDED BY
FRANGIEH BUT WAS ABSOLUTELY IMPRACTICABLE. HE HAD
CONVINCED MOST OF THE MUSLIM LEADERS OF THIS, BUT
RASHID KARAME WAS STILL HOLDING OUT. HE PLANNED TO SEE
RASHID THE NEXT DAY TO MAKE ONE LAST TRY WITH HIM. IF
HE FAILED, HE WAS GOING AHEAD NEVERTHELESS.

5. HE ENUMERATED A NUMBER OF THE REFORMS WHICH HE
WILL PROPOSE. THEY WILL INCLUDE EQUAL REPRESENTATION
IN THE PARLIAMENT FOR MUSLIMS AND CHRISTIANS, CREATION
OF AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL WHICH WILL BE A
CONSULTATIVE BODY, DECENTRALIZATION OF DEVELOPMENT,
I.E., GIVING EACH MUHAFAZA AUTHORITY TO SPEND FUNDS
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ON LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK
OF AN OVERALL NATIONAL PLAN, PROVISION THAT WHILE THE
PRESIDENT PICKS THE PRIME MINISTER, THE PARLIAMENT
CAN VOTE HIM OUT OF OFFICE, WITH PROVISION THAT THE
PRESIDENT CAN REMOVE HIM IN THE EVENT THE REST OF THE
CABINET RESIGNS BUT THE PRIME MINISTER TRIES TO STAY
ON (HE WANTS TO AVOID THE SITUATION FRANGIEH FOUND
HIMSELF IN WITH KARAME) ETC. IF HE CAN GET THIS PACKAGE
ACCEPTED, WHICH HE HOPES TO DO IN THE NEXT TWO MONTHS,
THEN HE CAN START GETTING MUSLIM AND CHRISTIAN TOGETHER
AND SOME PROGRESS CAN BE MADE ON RECONSTITUTION OF THE
LEBANESE STATE.

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6. IN THE MEANTIME, AND LACKING COHERENT ARMY, HE HAS HAD TO PLAY ROLE OF INTERMEDIARY AND PLEAD WITH PEOPLE LIKE CHAMOUN AND GEMAYEL NOT TO MAKE TROUBLE, RATHER THAN TELLING THEM TO STOP. GOL HAD JUST TAKEN IMPORTANT STEP WITH REGARD TO THIS, HIS THIRD PROBLEM. AS MORNING PRESS HAD INDICATED, THEY WERE MAKING IMPORTANT COMMAND CHANGES IN THE ARMY. SOME SIXTY-ODD OFFICERS WERE BEING REMOVED FROM COMMANDS SUCH AS FAYYADIYAH AND SARBA AND PUT AT THE DISPOSITION OF CENTRAL HEADQUARTERS. THESE OFFICERS HAD BEEN LOYAL TO POLITICAL LEADERS RATHER THAN TO GEN KHOURY, AND THE LATTER HAD SAID HE COULD NOT CONTINUE TO OPERATE UNDER SUCH CONDITIONS. THEY WERE BEING REPLACED BY A MIX OF CHRISTIAN AND MOSLEM OFFICERS WHO WERE READY TO GIVE THEIR LOYALTY TO KHOURY. HE HAD, FOR INSTANCE, REPLACED THE COMMANDER OF THE PRESIDENTIAL GUARD WITH A MOSLEM. IN GENERAL HE WAS TRYING TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF MOSLEM OFFICERS AT HEADQUARTERS AND OTHER STRATEGIC LOCATIONS. THESE MOVES WERE NOT AT ALL
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PLEASING TO THE CHAMOUNS AND GEMAYELS, BUT THEY WERE A NECESSARY STEP IN BUILDING THE ARMY, WITHOUT WHICH THERE WOULD BE NO STATE.

7. I SAID HE COULD NOT POSSIBLY SATISFY EVERYONE, AND THIS MOVE WAS VERY IMPORTANT AND ENCOURAGING.

8. WE THEN TALKED BRIEFLY ABOUT THE MILITARY SURVEY TEAM. I TOLD HIM THAT WE WERE NOW PROPOSING MARCH 31 ARRIVAL,

BUT IT WAS VERY IMPORTANT THAT DATE BE KEPT SECRET,
FOR SECURITY REASONS. HE TOOK NOTE AND SAID HE ASSUMED
WE WOULD BE INFORMING THE MILITARY.

9. FINALLY, I NOTED THAT PAN AMERICAN HAD TOLD US
ABOUT TWO WEEKS AGO THAT IT WOULD BE RESUMING FLIGHTS
HERE ON JULY 1 BUT HAD NOW CHANGED ITS MIND AND POST-
PONED RESUMPTION INDEFINITELY BECAUSE OF THE FAYYADIYAH
INCIDENT. SARKIS SAID THEY SHOULD AWAIT THE OUTCOME
OF THE MILITARY TRIAL, BECAUSE THAT WOULD DETERMINE
THE FUTURE OF LEBANON.

10. COMMENT: FAR FROM NEEDING GUT STIFFENER, SARKIS HAS APPARENTLY
DECIDED ON HIS OWN TO TAKE DRASTIC ACTION REGARDING
THE ARMY. WE HOPE HE CAN WEATHER THE INEVITABLE
OPPOSITION, BUT PRESENCE OF SYRIANS IS AN IMPORTANT
TRUMP IN THIS REGARD. HIS REMARKS ALSO IMPLIED THAT
HE IS PREPARED TO ACCEPT COURT JUDGEMENT WHICH MAY GO
SO FAR AS DEATH PENALTY FOR ONE OR MORE LEBANESE. THIS WILL
ALSO BE DIFFICULT PILL FOR CHRISTIAN RIGHT TO SWALLOW. CONCILIA-
TION PROJECT, BY COMPARISON, SHOULD BE MUCH EASIER TO SELL.
THERE IS ALMOST UNANIMITY ON MOST OF ITS PROVISIONS
ALREADY. CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES OF SORT PROPOSED,
HOWEVER, ARE BY THEMSELVES UNLIKELY TO HAVE MAJOR IMPACT
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AND THAT IS ONE OF THE PRINCIPAL CRITICISMS MADE AGAINST
SARKIS -- THAT HE TENDS TO THINK TOO MUCH IN TERMS OF
LEGISLATION RATHER THAN POLITICAL ACTION.

11. IN ANY EVENT, I AM ENCOURAGED THAT HE HAS BITTEN
THE ARMY BULLET. THERE IS STILL HOPE FOR LEBANON.
PARKER

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